

Giver of Life

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Date: 11 September 2022

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[0 : 0 0] We started last week Sunday evening series on the Holy Spirit where we're looking across the Bible at different passages that are especially about the Holy Spirit. And we're thinking in the series about the identity of the Spirit, the activity of the Spirit, and how we walk in the Spirit.

So what the Spirit does, who the Spirit is, and how we grow more and more in walking in the Spirit. Last week we said from John 14 that the Spirit is personal, that the Spirit is God, that the Spirit is what the New Testament calls the pericaleo, the one who comes alongside and tells us over and over again as Christians when you forget that you are a child of God.

And this week tonight we go all the way back to the beginning to really get into the depths of who the Holy Spirit is over the next three or four weeks, Sunday nights. And we start on page one with verse one, Genesis 1-3, and it's parallel passage which we read from in Psalm 104, both of these texts are obviously about creation.

And tonight we're going to see a little bit more of the identity of the Holy Spirit in order to know the Spirit more intimately, more closely. So three things we're going to see here in these first three verses of Genesis 1.

First, the breath of God. Secondly, the hovering Spirit. And third, the Holy Spirit. Okay, so let's do that together. First, the breath of God. Last week we looked at John 14, but you don't have to go all the way to the book of John where Jesus says, remember Jesus says, I'm leaving you and I'm sending the Spirit to you. And then in Acts 2 the Spirit comes.

[1 : 4 6] You don't have to go all the way to the New Testament. Sometimes I think, as Christians, we think about the Holy Spirit as a New Testament thing, as a New Testament reality.

And so we think of the Spirit, we think of being, as Jesus said in John 3, to be born again, you need the Holy Spirit. Or if you're going to have a gift, a spiritual gift, you need it from the Holy Spirit.

Or if you want to have a personal experience of God, you need the Holy Spirit. If you want to have empowerment and if you want something big to happen in your life. Now look, all those things are true. We're going to get to those things later in the series.

But Abraham Kuiper, who was the Prime Minister of the Netherlands in 1901 to 1905, he wrote a book about the Holy Spirit. And he's asked a question in it that's really fascinating and really helpful. He says, in the life and death of a redeemed Christian, everybody acknowledges the work of the Spirit.

As we watch the Queen be buried next week, we acknowledge the work of the Spirit in her life. Everybody acknowledges the work of the Spirit in the life of a Christian, the life of a Christian who dies.

[2 : 5 5] But then he says this, but who will trace his work in the movement of the stars? But who traces his work all the way to the movement of the stars?

In other words, Kuiper's saying what Genesis 1 says, and that's that the Spirit is more active, more present, more critical to everything in creation than just our personal empowerment.

And we see this right here in Genesis 1. There's two things that jump out as soon as you read this passage. One, two important lessons here. We said the first one last week, but I'll say it again.

You don't have to go all the way to the New Testament to learn that the Spirit is God. It's right here in Genesis 1. We said it last week, but can you say it too many times?

The Spirit is God. I think we can say it again. The Spirit is God. Genesis 1 tells us that in the very first two verses, in the first verse, it says, God made from nothing.

[3 : 57] We read there, God made the heavens and the earth, meaning he made everything that is spiritual and material. All things immaterial and material, God made.

And from the New Testament, we learned that God did that by the Father, God speaking all materiality and immateriality into existence from nothing.

And then the very next verse says, and the earth was without form and void. It was dark, but the Spirit of God was hovering. And so the first subject of the Bible is God. And the second subject of the Bible, verse two, is the Spirit.

And so we immediately learned that the God who spoke all materiality and immateriality into the world is also the God who hovers over the waters of the deep at the beginning.

The Spirit, the Spirit is this God, that the Spirit is the Lord. And so we say, Christians for a long time now have been using creeds and confessions for us to say what we believe in short order form.

[5 : 08] And one of the most historic and important creeds is the Nicene Creed. And in the Nicene Creed, it says that the Holy Spirit is two things. The first thing, the Holy Spirit is the Lord.

And the Nicene Creed gets that from Genesis one, verse one and two. The Holy Spirit is the Lord because the Nicene Creed says that the Father is the maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty.

And the Holy Spirit is Lord, maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty. And so we say that the one God makes heaven and earth.

Augustine, the great Bishop of Hippo back in the fifth century, he said it like this. He said, by this supremely, equally and unchangeably good trinity, all things were made.

So that the entire creation bears the stamp of the trinity, that God is writ large by his presence into all of creation. Because he made it. Because the Spirit is the Lord. The Spirit is the Creator.

[6 : 12] Because God is Creator. Now there's so many sermons that we're preaching 11 or so on the Holy Spirit that we can get very specific here. And we should. And so let's do that. We not only say that the Spirit is Lord and the maker of heaven and earth because the Spirit is God.

But right here we learn that also at the same time, the Spirit has a distinct role in creation as well. And so while God makes the world, we also see from the Bible that God the Father speaks creation into existence.

God, the Son mediates the creation into existence. And then the Spirit here has a specific role as well in forming the world and making the world.

Now the way to get at it is actually to think a little bit about the context of Genesis. Genesis one. Genesis was written by Moses when Israel was passing through the wilderness in the 40 year wanderings after they had left Egypt.

And then Moses delivers in some sense a great sermon, which includes Genesis to the Israelites as they are about to cross over a small river to enter the Promised Land.

[7 : 26] So this is the second time they've come up to the Promised Land and Moses is there. He's giving them Genesis. And remember, Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years.

And if you even go back before that, Israel, the people that will become Israel come from Abraham. And Abraham had been a man, a pagan who had lived in what will one day be called Babylon at the time.

It was the land near Babel where the Tower of Babel had been constructed. And so the people of Israel are ultimately birthed out of Babylonian origins and then filtered through Egyptian Egypt for 400 years.

And so there are two things that we know that the Israelites were swimming in all the time, the culture around them. One, Babylonian myths about how the world came to be.

And secondly, if you've been in Egypt for 400 years as slaves, what do you think you're being taught all the time? Egyptian myths about how the world came to be. And Moses is writing this book to those people who are God's people who have been delivered from both Babylon, Babylon back in the day under Abram, and then all the way forward to being delivered out of Egypt.

[8 : 39] Now we have the stories of Babylon and Egypt and what they said about how the world came to be. And in both of them, one of the most significant features is that the world came forth from what they say was a water goddess.

From the water, that the water was the prime thing from which the world came. And in one famous Babylonian story, it says that there was a goddess, her name was Tiamat, another god, she was the goddess of the water, and another god killed her and cut open her belly, and that her organs came forth.

And that is what the world is. The world is the guts of a slain water goddess. Now that was the prominent story in the ancient world that was filtered around that the Israelites knew that they were prior to Egypt and in Egypt, and Egypt said something incredibly similar, and it was incredibly negative of you.

It meant that the world number one was an accident, that it didn't mean to happen. The world number two was not designed in any way. Number three, the gods in both accounts made people and certain people to be slaves because the gods didn't want to have to take care of the world.

So humanity is basically a slave race. And Egypt said this is why certain people need to be slaves and not others. Now these were the big stories, and you see what's happening here at the beginning.

[10 : 08] When God makes the heavens and the earth, in verse number two, it says that the spirit comes down and hovers over the deep.

And that Hebrew word for deep is a word for water, and it sounds almost identical to the word Tiamat in Hebrew.

You see what Moses is doing? He's making fun. It's a pun. He's saying that, let me tell you the true story. In the beginning, God made everything from nothing, and then the spirit of God came into the world and stood over the waters and says, you're just a creature.

You're just like everything else. I'll take the deep water and I'll organize it too, just like I've organized everything. And he's saying that everything that Egypt had taught the people of Israel and everything that Babel and its legacy and traditions had taught the people of the world was completely wrong.

That there's a God who made something out of nothing and that the spirit comes into the world to do something very specific and that's to put the deep, the water, the Tiamat into its place.

[11 : 18] That it's just a creature. And that's where we say that the spirit's very specific role in creation is that the spirit takes the world that God spoke into existence and puts everything in its place.

When we look throughout Genesis 1, 4 to 25, and we see the land being divided from the water, the sun and the moon being separate as the two lights, all sorts of things, humans being designated distinct from animals and plant life.

Who does that? The spirit of God does that. The spirit is the one who organizes, perfects the things that God has made. In the U.S. there is an enormous home furnishing store, a store where you, if you want to renovate your house, this is the place to go.

Well, this is controversial. There's two really. But one of them is Home Depot. You probably know about Home Depot. Home Depot. I love Home Depot. But Home Depot is basically the same as Home Base here.

And there was a little commercial that Home Depot used to run all the time and it was a song. I'm not going to sing it, but it had a little jingle and it said, We make your house a home.

[12 : 35] Well, then I came here and I figured out that Home Base has a strap line and it's, We make your house a home. Now, I don't know who said it first. I'm not sure if it was the U.S. or the U.K. Home Base or Home Depot.

I don't know, but the Holy Spirit did it first. Okay. The Holy Spirit is the God who makes the house of creation into home.

He takes the material that God has made and makes it into the Garden of Eden. He makes it into the home of humanity. He's the perfecter. He's the organizer.

In the New Testament, there is no salvation without the breath of God coming into your life and giving you life. And in the Old Testament, long before, there is no creation without the breath of God, the spirit of God coming into your life.

And so the word that's translated in verse two, after it says that darkness was over the face of the deep, the deep water, the spirit of God was hovering. The word spirit there can also be translated breath or wind.

[13 : 47] The same thing that Jesus refers to in John chapter three when he says you need the breath. If you want to have the breath of God in your life, the Holy Spirit in your life, if you want to have life at all, you need the spirit.

That's not just about salvation. That's about life, period. And so let me give you two applications of why this matters. One is this. It means that we can never think of the Holy Spirit as playing a minor role in world history until Acts chapter two.

The Holy Spirit doesn't just show up when Jesus leaves. No, not at all. Sometimes I think it's easy for us, if you're a Christian tonight, it's easy to say, I see Jesus in the gospels that God the Son became historical in flesh.

And I can see him there and he shows me the Father, but I don't know if the Holy Spirit is active in my life. And that's an important question. Is the Holy Spirit active in my life?

And look, at least I can ask you this. Are you drawing breath at the moment? Because if you are, then the Holy Spirit is active in your life, that in him you live and you move and you have your being, as Paul pronounces in Acts 17.

[15 : 09] That the Holy Spirit is the one who does that. The Holy Spirit gives you life and breath. He is the one who takes every embryo and gives it soul, gives it identity, gives it consciousness. It's the spirit that's doing that all the time.

Now secondly, there's something else here significant. Many of us are tempted, we are many of us, we're all tempted to say that my life and the good things that happen in my life are largely the results of my accomplishments.

That my gifts and my talents, the things that I've been able to do, we're prone to think of them as largely a result of me. And there's something significant here.

There's a reason why if you look throughout world history, you look throughout Bible history, you see that in almost every religion, in every religion in all of history, apart from Christianity, that people are very prone to worship things in nature.

People are prone to worship sea goddesses or to worship inanimate statues or to worship rocks and trees or to worship the mother goddess. And that's not 2,000 years ago, that's today in 2022 in the city of Edinburgh, that people are prone to worship nature, either trees and rocks, the sun, the moon, or me, ourselves.

[16 : 41] One or the other to worship the things of nature. Now, let me say that it makes sense. Because if we are what God says we are, and we are sinners, and the spirit of the living God is that near to us, giving us life and breath. If it's the spirit of God that's holding together creation at all times, there's not a single grasshopper, caterpillar, butterfly, none of it that lives apart from the spirit, not one.

And if the spirit of God is that close to creation, then it makes a lot of sense that we as sinners would get creation confused with creator. The spirit is that close.

And if we're the image of God, it's not surprising that we would say, well, we start to worship ourselves, that we get confused because God is that near, is that near, but our rebellious heart's been the truth just a little bit.

And we fail to see creator, instead we see creature. We worship thing instead of the one who provides the thing. And that's why all of that to say is why the Nicene Creed says, remember two things about the spirit.

The spirit is the Lord, and the spirit is the giver of life. Genesis one versus one and two. Secondly, and briefly, the hovering spirit.

[18 : 01] Here in Genesis one, two, there's one more thing we learn about the Holy Spirit. It's hinted here, and that's that Moses uses a metaphor for us to understand the spirit's work.

He says here that the breath of God or the spirit of God, quote, hovers over the face of the deep, over the face of the waters, hovers. Now hovers, what does that verb sound like to you?

There are a few ways to read it, but there's only one place in the rest of the Bible where we actually have the same exact Hebrew word in the very specific form of this Hebrew word.

And it's in Deuteronomy 32 verse 11, and it says this, like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them like an eagle. And it's that word, the eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young. I did the motion, flutters.

That's the word hovers that we see here in Genesis one, two. That's the only time it appears like that. And that means that Moses here is giving us an image when the spirit condescended into the world in history, came down above the mighty water, the deep.

[19 : 25] He's saying that the spirit was like a mother bird from Deuteronomy 32 11. Moses wrote both books. And he's saying then, it says here that the bird hovered over her young, caring for them. And he's saying that not only is the spirit the spirit of God, who gives life into the world and organizes it according to the purpose of God, but the spirit is the one who also continues to care for it.

That the spirit doesn't just do it once and leave, that the spirit comes back over and over again, always and forever and cares. He is the spirit not only of creation, but also of providence, as we say.

He provides, he continues to care for us, to care for all of creation. We read that in Psalm 104 27 to 30. It said that the spirit renews life, that the spirit creates life, renews life, gives life, takes away life.

So Lord, if we're going to have breath, we must have the spirit. The spirit gives life and takes it away. The spirit provides food. The spirit reveals God to the world, that the spirit is doing all these things, caring for creation in these ways at all times.

He creates your life, He creates your soul, not just once in the womb, but He cares for it right now. He cares for it. He provides for it right now. Now let me give you one more application, one more thing that this means.

[20 : 52] And it's this, that just like we as humans, I think, as sinners, we're prone to look at creation because God is so close in read nature as if it's God itself or our own selves.

In the same way, there's also another mistake because of the work of the spirit that we're prone to. And it's this, because we're sinners, we've got to be very, very careful that we don't fail to see that the spirit is actively caring for the world right now.

You know, this mistake can go so far. It can take us to a place where we start to say things like, you know, the only good music to listen to is Christian music.

Only good books to read are Christian books. The only things that we can listen to are from the Christian world. The only good thing on earth is the church.

And we, whoa, the Holy Spirit is the one who cares for creation. The Holy Spirit is the one who beautifies and gives life and breath to everything. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives good gifts to all people.

[22 : 04] It's the reason that we can have society because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the common grace gift of God to the world who gives life and breath to everything. We've got to be careful that we don't curse that which God gives life to.

That the problem with this world, in other words, is not the work of the spirit. The problem with this world is our sin, but that's what's wrong with the world. So that takes us lastly, thirdly, to the Holy Spirit, emphasis on holy.

One of the ways that theologians will often talk about Genesis 1, 1-3 and all that God is doing here is to say that as soon as we see God enter into the world, we see that God makes the world holy, holy.

That the spirit's work is to make things holy. And holy, that's a complicated word. Throughout the Bible, it means many things, but the most fundamental meaning of the word holy is for something to do what it's meant to do, to be what it's meant to be according to God, and to therefore be a fitting place for God to dwell.

So something in this world that is holy in creation is when it's, it is what it's meant to be, it does what it's meant to do, as God intended. And so therefore it's a fitting place for the living God to come down and dwell.

[23 : 31] And the Holy Spirit's work is to put things in their place, to give them life, and to make them holy for them to be exactly what God meant for them to be. In the beginning, he says no to the chaos of the deep, and he makes the world holy.

He brings the world all the way to the point of the garden. Sin steps in and cracks and fissures the world. It breaks everything, and yet the Holy Spirit keeps it together, pieces it together, making certain spaces of the world fit, clean, so that God might come and dwell even in the midst of a sinful world.

That that's always been the work of the Spirit from the very beginning of history. The Spirit, despite us saying no to God, has been the God who says yes to us by bringing spaces on earth as fit places for God to come down.

God has always been coming down because of the work of the Spirit making space clean, that God comes down. And so listen, this is what this means for you tonight. Look, sometimes when you read the Bible, you come to passages, especially in Paul, but I think it's subtly right here, where what this passage does is helps a Christian understand what has happened to them, the power that has entered into your life.

You know, that's what this does. This helps us, if you're a believer tonight, if you look to Jesus Christ in faith tonight, what this does is helps you understand what has happened to you.

[25 : 10] What has happened to you? And here it is that the logic of the Spirit's work in creation is exactly the same in new creation.

You see that the power of the Spirit is the God who comes down and makes things holy. He makes things fit for the presence of God. He takes what shouldn't be there, the chaos of the deep, and he perfects.

He puts life in its place. He makes something to exactly what it should be. Now, if you jump to the very end of the Bible in the book of Revelation, Revelation 2.7, you can ask this question, who is it that in the end will wipe away the tears?

Who is it in the end of history that will dismiss the darkness? Who is it that will make holy the land once again? Who will give us the Garden of Eden that we were made for? Revelation 2.7, this is what it says, He who has an ear, if you have ears, let them hear this.

This is what the Spirit says to the church. To the one who conquers, I, the Spirit, will grant you to eat of the tree of life, which is the paradise of God.

[26 : 25] That for the Christian, it is the Holy Spirit who will one day perfect your life in this world and bring you into a state of glorification to the point where he will say, I give to you once again the tree of life in the Garden of God.

That's the Spirit's work. The Spirit makes holy. And so what are you to do? Ephesians 2.1 says that you're dead in sin, that you're dead in trespasses, that you don't deserve to be in the midst of holiness, that you are not holy, you're not what you were made to be, you're not perfected, you're not fit for the presence of God.

What does a dead person do? What do you do when all you have is dry bones, old, dusty bones? And here's what you do, you don't do anything.

You need the Spirit of creation who has become the Spirit of new creation through the work of Jesus to come into your life.

That's the one who raises up dry bones, who gives life from the dead. And so Romans 8 verse 11 says it outright. This is what it says. If the Spirit of Jesus, if the Spirit of him, I should say, who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in you.

[27 : 40] He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal body through his Spirit who does dwell in you. That this, look, if you're a Christian tonight and you have, you've received the Spirit, God has forgiven you in Christ through the cross and resurrection of Jesus because of the work of the Spirit applying that to your life.

Look, here's what you got to understand. Here's what we understand. That the Spirit of God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The Spirit of God put everything and creation in its place and is doing it right now.

And it's that Spirit who gives life to this fly. It's that Spirit. It's that Spirit, the Spirit of that power, the power of the resurrection of Jesus that is with you and near you, that is your power, that is your life.

Do you know Him? Do you pray in Him, to Him and through Him? Do you walk and step with Him? Do you look consciously for the agency of the Spirit of your life?

Charles Spurgeon said this, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without the wind, branches without any sap and like coals without fire.

[29 : 00] The Spirit of God is your life, your created life, but also the only power of new creation too.

Let's pray together. Father, we ask now that we would know the Spirit in our lives. And we pray, Father, that you would wake us up, that you would shake us up, that we would be conscious of the Holy Spirit.

So Spirit of God, come, Spirit of God, we pray, come and meet with us and work in our hearts. Change our thoughts and our attitudes, convict us of our sin as we read in our Catechism.

Teach us how to pray, show us your Word, but more than anything, point us to Jesus, the God-man crucified and resurrected for us.

So Spirit of God, speak to us, tell us that we are children of God. And we ask for that. In Christ's name tonight. Amen.